

Chance, fortune, or was it something else that happened?

*Syntactic change and functional
redistribution in happen-constructions*

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INTRODUCTION

HYPOTHESIS

CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

CONCLUSIONS

Research questions

- **How** do **highly schematic constructions** ('syntax') and **less schematic constructions interact?**
- Which principles underlie process of replacement of
 - *That*-complement by *to*-complement?
 - Episode marker A by episode marker B?

Case study

- **Set** of *happen*-constructions
- All share a ***happen-verb*** · expresses contingency
- All share a focal **clausal complement** · what happens

(1) *Than it happend (befell/fortuned/chanced/...) þat sho wex grete & drew nere hur tyme, & hur susters þe nonnys pursevid. (c1450. Alph.Tales)*

Finite type

[HAPPEN {that| \emptyset } X Vf]

(1') *Than it happend (her) (bat) sho wex grete. (c1450. Alph.Tales)*

- Preverbal · empty subject ('impersonal', 'extraposed')
- Postverbal · optional oblique experiencer (*her*)

Non-finite type

[Sbj-OBL HAPPEN (*to*) Inf]

(2) & **bape hemm fell to polenn** wa || *burrh ifell wifess irre*
'& to both of them (it) happened to suffer pain through an evil woman's anger' (?c1200)

- Preverbal · empty subject or
 - oblique topic-experiencer (≠syntactic subject)

[Sbj HAPPEN (*to*) Inf]

(3) *At y^e last* **he hapenyd to forget** *it clene.* (1526. *Merry tales*)

- Preverbal · Personal syntactic subject ('raised')

Episode introducer

- Brinton (1996) identifies narrative function
- *Happen*-verb codes **break** with preceding episode/intro
- Clausal complement is **event leading to** ensuing episode

(4) *Aftir him was Leon pope xxi zere. He held þe grete councell at Calcidony ageyn Euticen, þe heretik. It **happed on a Pase-day he hoselid a certeyn woman, and sche kissid his hand**, aftir wech kissing he had swech temptacion þat for vexacion he ded smyte of þat hand. þan was þere mech grucching in þe puple whi he sang no messe. Tho was he fayn to pray oure Lady Mary of help, and sche appered onto him and restored his hand. (a1464. Capgr. Chron.)*

Replacement by [*when* X, Y]

- [*When* X, Y] provides greater textual cohesion ('style')
- Similar function (Brinton 1996)

(5) *Two fyres on the auter gan she beete,/ ... Whan kindled was the fyr, with pitous cheere/ Unto Dyane she spak.*

'Two fires she fed on the altar ... **When the fire was kindled**, with a piteous expression unto Diane she spoke.' (c1390)

- Main clause [Y] is **event leading to** ensuing episode
- [*When* X, Y] **frames** ensuing episode (Thompson 1987)
⇔ no equivalent in *happen*-construction



Unresolved questions

- Is there quantitative evidence for the replacement?
- Were all *happen*-constructions given up?
- How to account for constructional variation (*that* vs. *to*)?

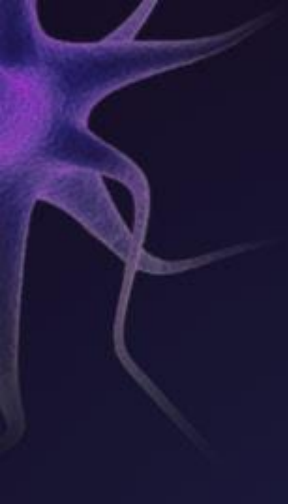
More unresolved questions

- Episode-boundary function applies to **narrative** text units
- *Happen*-constructions also occur in **non-narrative** use

(6) *Also, 3if it so **bifalle** that any of the brotherhede falle in pouerte or be anyentised thurw3 elde, that he may nat helpe hym self, ... he schal haue in þe wyke xiiij.d. (1384-1425)*

(7) *And it ofte **chaunceth** that the euill, that the diuell soweth in the thought, the flesh therin deliteth. (1565)*

- How do these fit into the picture?



INTRODUCTION

HYPOTHESIS

CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

CONCLUSION AND BEYOND

Constructionist approach

- Constructions = form + function (Goldberg 2006)
- *That* and *to*-complementation are **highly schematic**
 - ?function
- *Happen*-constructions are **less schematic constructions**
 - show conventionalized pragmatic function
- Interaction dynamics assumed to be formal & functional
- Not (only) a matter of stylistics

Shift to non-finites

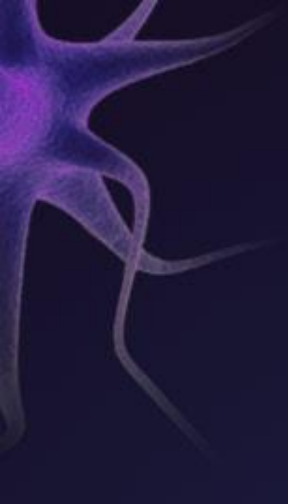
- SVO Leads to topic-subject alignment (Los 2009, 2012)
- (1)
- Puts pressure on preverbal non-subjects (Möhlig 2012)
 - Non-finite type has topical subject
- ⇒ Redistribution from finite to non-finite complements

System shift to backgrounding

- SVO leads to topic-subject alignment (Los 2009, 2012)

(2)

- Temporal foreground marking ('then VS') declines
 - Background marking through subordination increases
 - *When*-constructions are part of this story
- ⇒ The language system is being rebalanced



INTRODUCTION

HYPOTHESIS

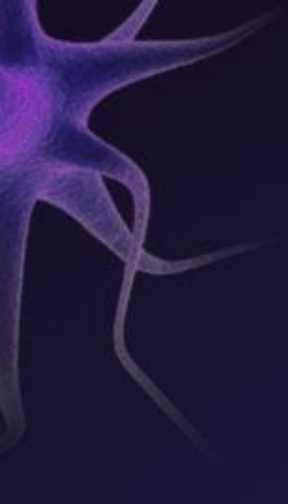
CORPUS

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

CONCLUSION AND BEYOND

LEON 0.3 (Petré 2013)

- Meta-corpus covering OE-1640
- *Ca.* 400,000 words / period
- Genre-balanced
- Draws selectively on
 - Existing corpora (YCOE, PPCME2, HC, LAEME 2.1, MEG-C)
 - Transcriptions from editions
 - Transcriptions from scanned MS
- Problem · Narrative of 1151-1350 is mainly verse



INTRODUCTION
HYPOTHESIS
CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS
CONCLUSION AND BEYOND



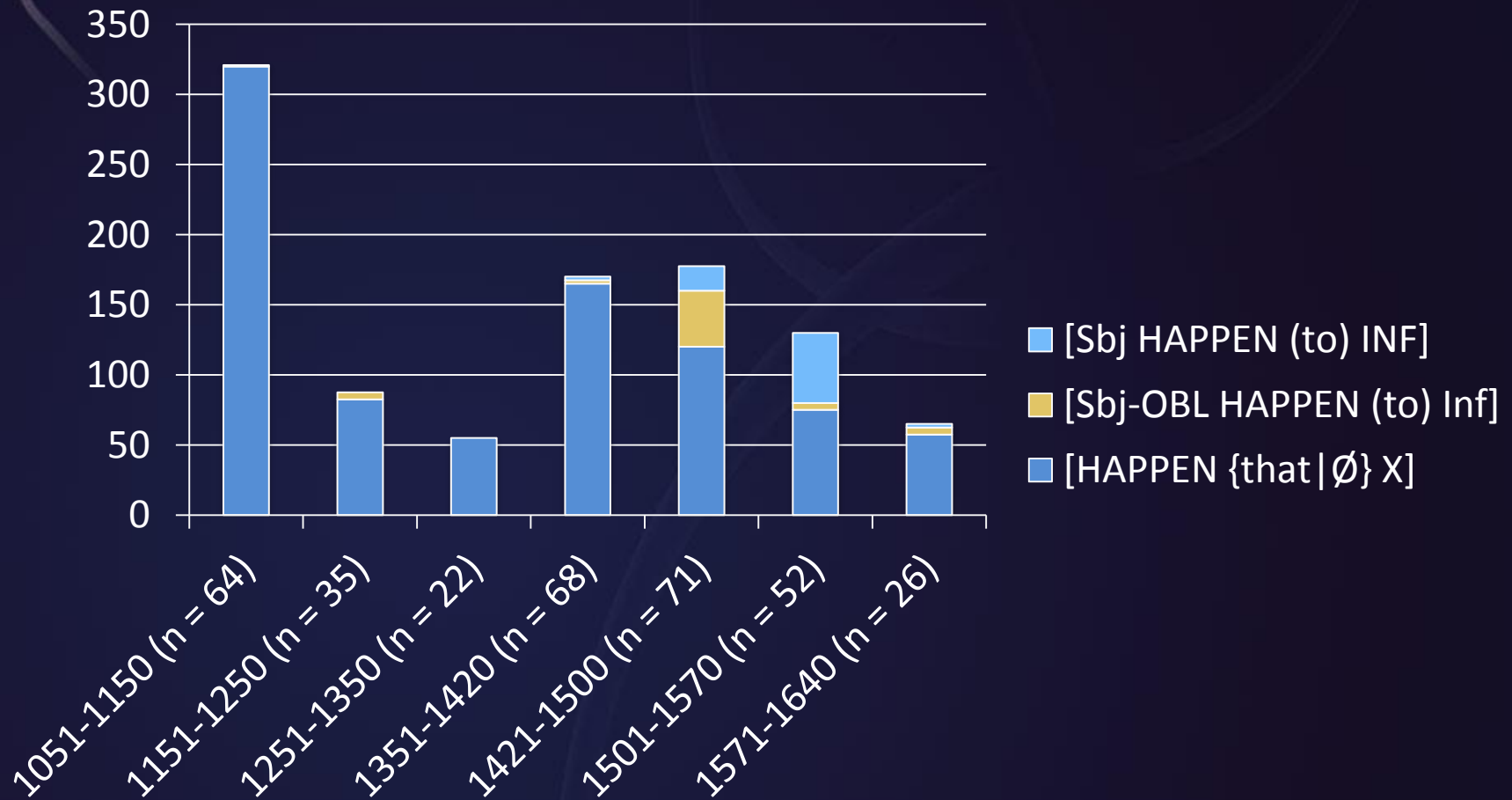
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

What happened?

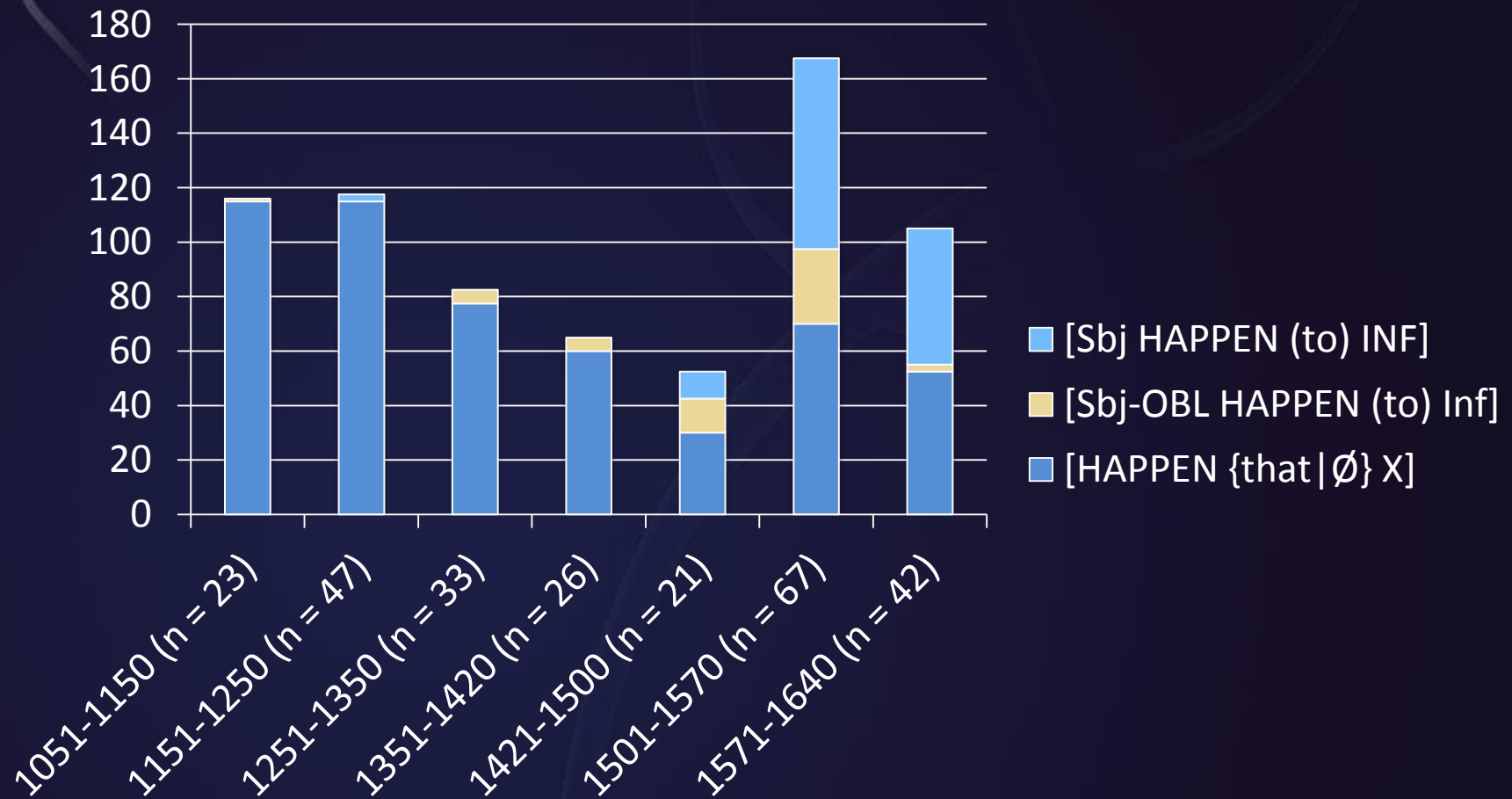
Everything under control?

When this does not help?

Narrative *pmw*



Non-narrative *pmw*



Verb-second in Old English

- V2 separates topic from focus
- Preverbal slot = topic \neq subject
- Preverbal slot in *happen*-construction
 - Empty (new episode) (Los 2005)
 - Time adverb
 - Non-subject topical experiencer

(8) *It (Ø)/Then/Him happened that he reached the shore*

Loss of V2 · take one

- Gradually, syntactic topic-subject became obligatory
- Pressure on all other constructions

Dealing with loss

- Some *happen*-verbs also occurred with personal subjects

(9) *If I happyn wele ...*

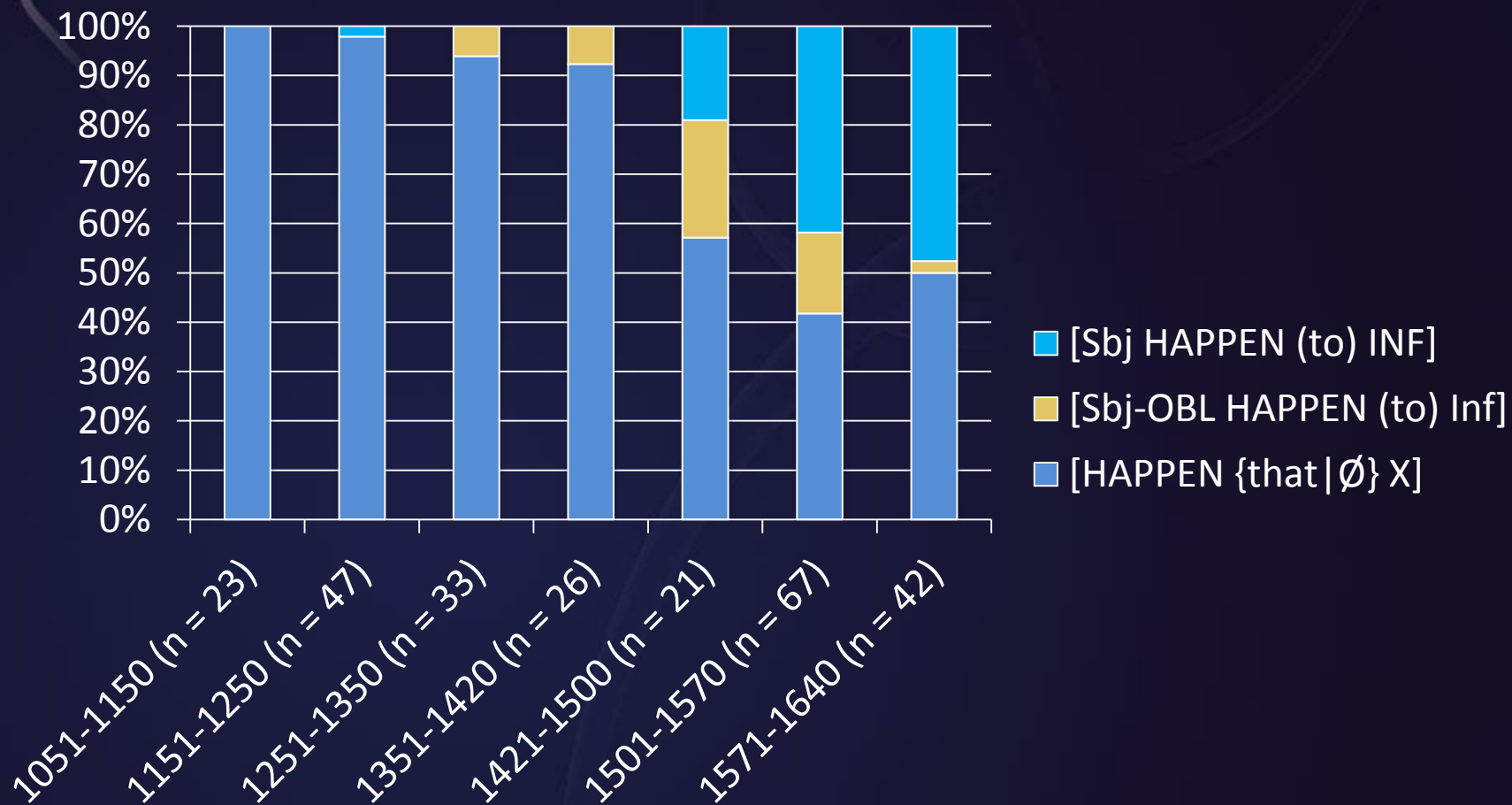
‘If I turn out to be successful...’ ($\alpha 1500(\alpha 1450)$)

⇒ Raised construction with topic-subject

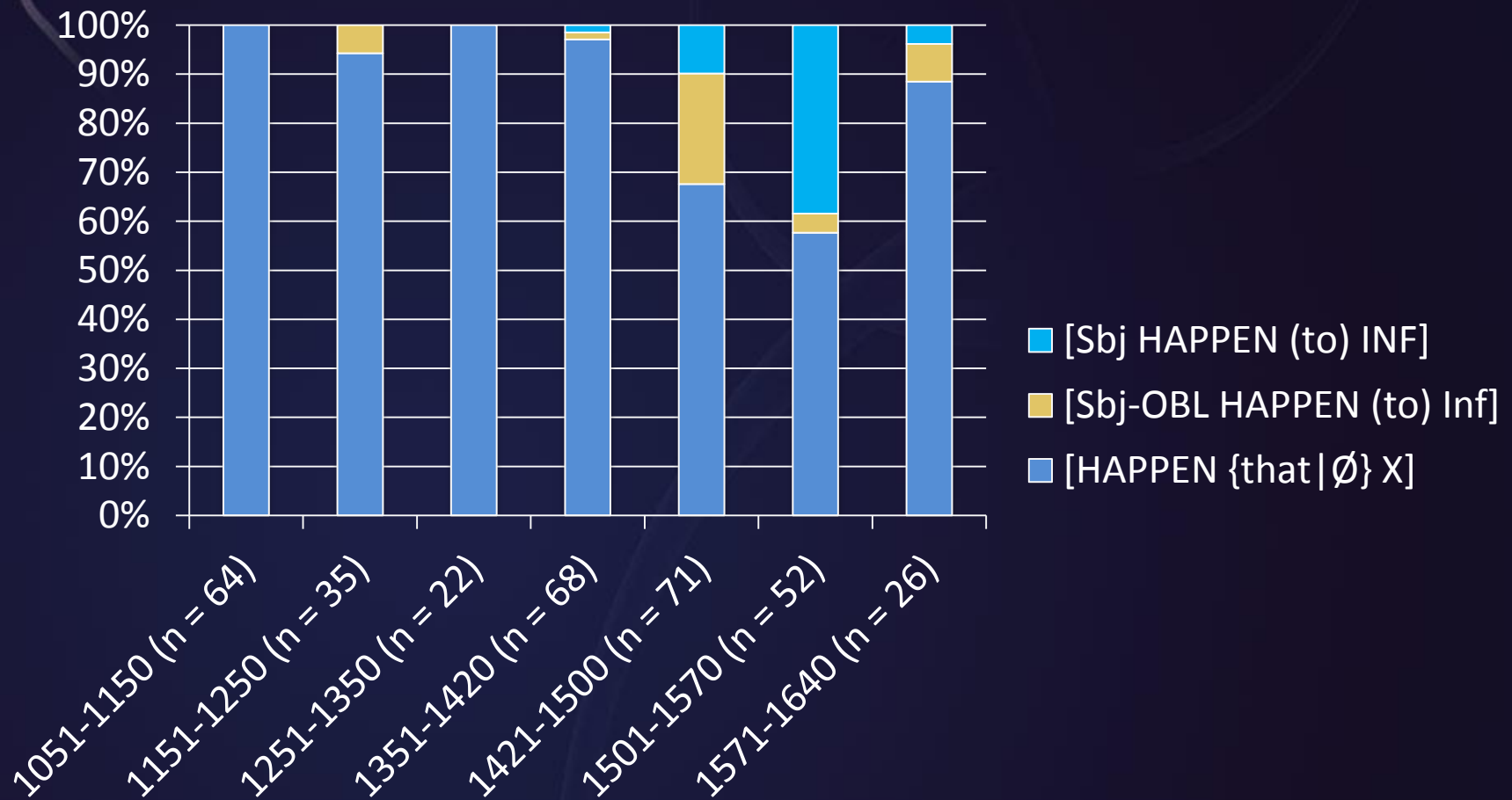
(9') *If I happen to be successful ...*

⇒ Expected to gain more and more ground (Los 2005)

Redistribution non-narrative



Redistribution narrative?





ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

What happened?

Everything under control?

When this does not help?

Why?

- Why did the constructional redistribution proceed differently in narrative and non-narrative text units?
- ⇒ Raised construction comes at the cost of function shift
- Function shift relates to (semantic) control and iconicity

Control *versus* no control

- Animate subject is in control of event action

(10) *It **chaunced** ... that James ... breaking his oath invaded England*

⇒ James broke his oath and invaded England = **Control**

- Animate subject is patient or not in control of action

(11) *Yf any Peere of this Realme shall **happen** to be indicted of any Offense made Treason ... by this Acte, ... (1581)*

⇒ A peer is indicted of treason = **No control**

Similar constructions ...

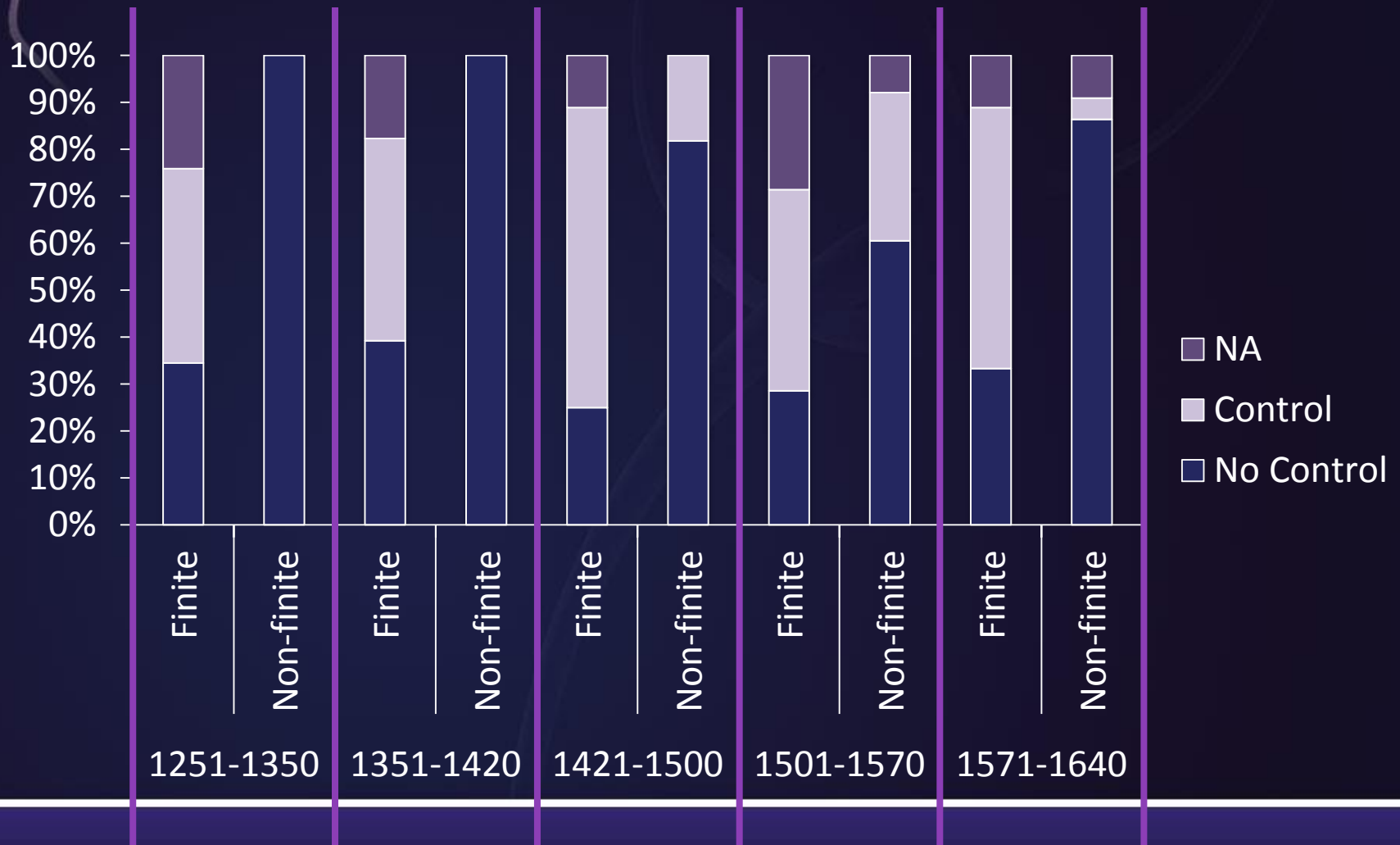
- Initially all could encode episode break (with control)

(2'') *It happed on a Pase-day he hoselid* ['administered the Holy Communion'] *a certeyn woman, and sche kissid his hand, aftir whech kissing he had swech temptacion þat for vexacion he ded smyte of þat hand.* (a1464)

(12) *So happed him ... be homely with hir* ['to have sex with her']. (c1450)

(13) *þer was a monke þat happenyd on a tyme to syn flessylie with a woman.* (c1450)

... and yet so different



Explanation · finites

- Focal event as a whole is postverbal complement
 - ⇒ *Happen*-verb separates event from previous situation
 - ⇒ Contingency relation between two states of affairs
 - ⇒ Episode boundary function emerges
- This holds for all events (+/- control)

Explanation · non-finites

- *Happen*-verb (contingency) separates subject from event
⇒ Explicit iconic signal that subject does not control event
- No explicit encoding of episode boundary
- The event('s outcome) is unpredictable
- The *happen*-verb approximates an epistemic modal
⇒ **Different constructions** imply different **functions**

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

What happened?

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Loss of V2 · take two

- Finite type lacks topical subject
- Non-finite type takes over
- Non-finite type halts in contexts with subject-control
- These are typically narrative
- Finite type still under pressure
- [*When* X, Y] fits into SVO better and gains ground

Grounding (Hopper 1979)

- OE foreground action = XVS(O) ('then ... then ...')
- OE background comments = SV(O)/SOV
- *Happen*-construction event is 'secondary foreground'
 - Advances the story in initiating a new episode
 - Paves the way for the real action

(15) *Ʒa **gelamp** hit on þære oðre niht, þæt se casere & Ablaiius gesawen begen ane gesihðe on swefone. Ʒam casere þuhte þæt se eadige Nicolaus come to him & ...*

'Then **happened** it on the other night, that the emperor & A. both saw a vision in a dream. To the emperor (it) seemed that the blessed Nicholas had come to him & ...' (a1200)

Emergence of *when*-clauses

- ME fixation of SVO also in foreground
- Background increasingly marked by subordinate clauses
- Secondary foreground better in main clause
- [*When* X, Y] = system realignment

(16) *Two fyres on the auter gan she beete,/ ... **Whan kindled was the fyr**, with pitous cheere/ Unto Dyane she spak.*

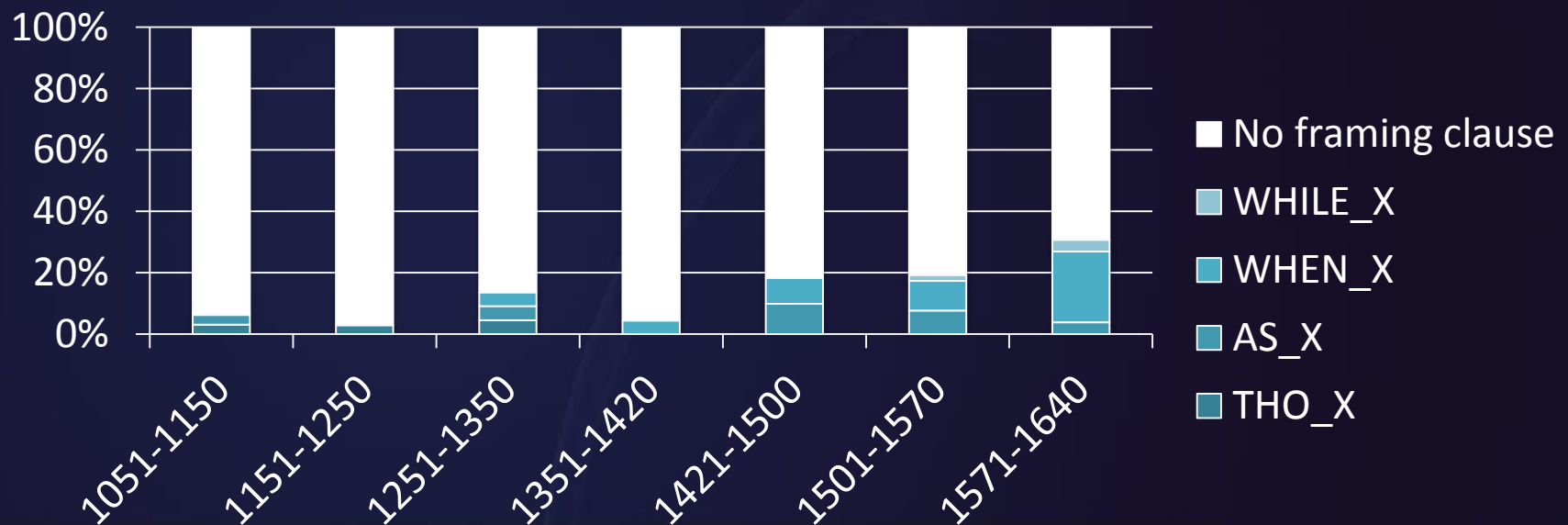
‘Two fires she fed on the altar ... **When the fire was kindled**, with a piteous expression unto Diane she spoke.’ (c1390)

- *When*-clause
 - Links to preceding = OE local ‘then ...’ anchors
 - Frames what follows = additional cohesive functionality

Competition from within

- Transition is prepared within *happen*-constructions

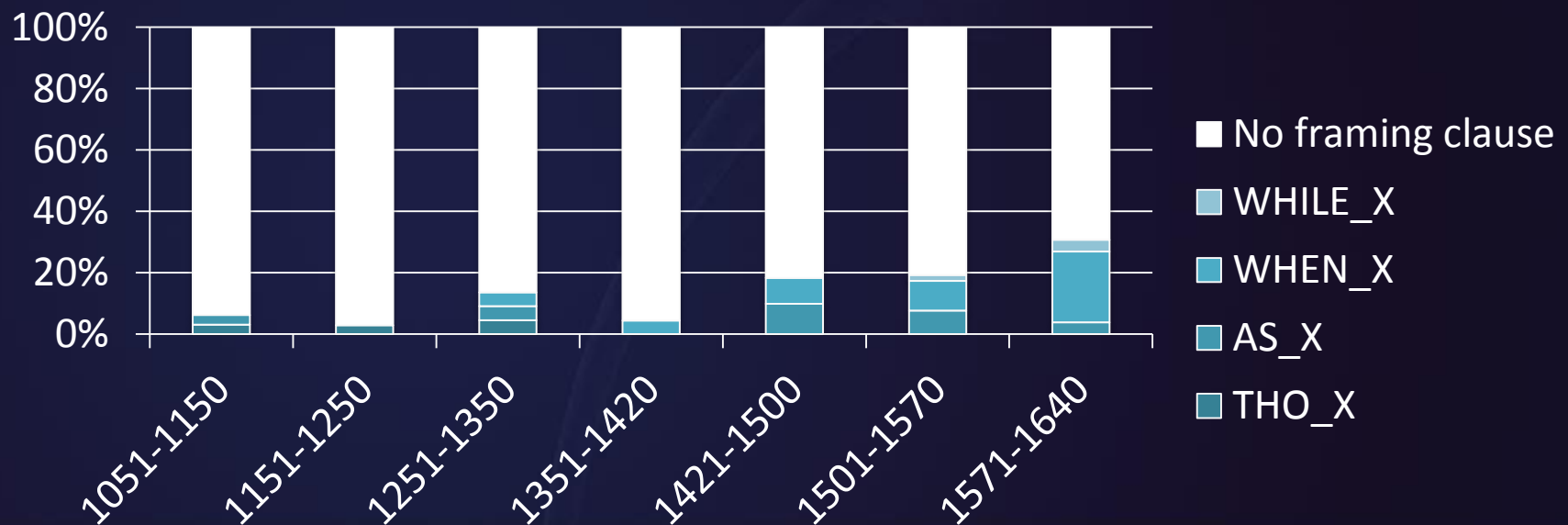
(17) *Anoper woman was of so euell lyuyng, pat scho dyd neuer good dede yn hir lyue ... Then fel hit, **when scho was ded**, fendys comen and fattyn hur soule to hell. (a1500 (a1415))*

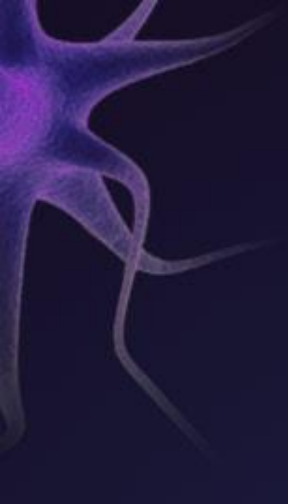


Competition from within

- Syntactically simpler and functionally non-redundant

(17') *Anoper woman was of so euell lyuyng, pat scho dyd neuer good dede yn hir lyue ... Then **when scho was ded**, fendys comen and fattyn hur soule to hell. (a1500 (a1415)*





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HYPOTHESIS
CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS
CONCLUSION

Conclusion

- Competition between *happen*-constructions
 - Pressure from system changes ($XV > SV$)
 - No blind ('syntactic') replacement by *to* BUT
 - Constrained by functional compatibility (no *to* in control)
- Replacement of *happen*-construction
 - Proceeds differently in different areas of use
 - Non-narrative : replacement by *to* is unproblematic
 - Narrative : [*When* X, Y]'s competitive position increases with word order shift

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Thanks!



<http://tinyurl.com/ku4s8kq>